

PALESTINE ESSAYS No. 25

THE THREE BASIC AMERICAN  
DECISIONS ON PALESTINE

BY

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PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION  
RESEARCH CENTER



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Palestine Liberation Organization  
Research Center  
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## *INTRODUCTION*

Three decisions by four different American Presidents have constituted the bases of more than fifty years of United States policy on the question of Palestine.

The key decisions taken by three 'Liberal' Democratic Presidents and one conservative Republican President laid the foundations of the Zionist state in Palestine, defined the relationship of this state with the Jews living throughout the world and enabled the Zionist state to gain military ascendancy in the Middle East.

The first and most important of the three American Presidential decisions was taken by President Wilson in 1917. Woodrow Wilson is not remembered for his action on the Palestine question but rather is considered a great liberator of peoples, for it was Wilson who enunciated the principle that the peoples of the dissolved Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires should be allowed to choose their own destiny. Yet when the time came, Wilson agreed with the proposition that the rule of self-determination should not be applied to Palestine. Wilson decided that Palestine should be given to the Jews — who then comprised only ten per cent of the population of that country.

The second decision was taken by Franklin D. Roosevelt when, in 1943, he urged the British Government, then the authority in Palestine, to permit the entry of 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine, the very 100,000 refugees who had been denied entry into the United States. By this decision Roosevelt linked the fate of the European Jewish refugees to the future of Palestine and thus validated the Zionist claim that Palestine must be reserved as the ultimate refuge of the world's Jews.

Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower took the third basic decision. Contrary to popular belief Truman was not the American President to play the most important role in the founding of Israel and his key decision was not the immediate recognition of the self-proclaimed Zionist state, Israel, on May 15, 1948. Truman's real decision was that the United States would not send American armed forces to help the Zionists establish their state in Palestine. And this was not a pro-Zionist decision at all. But this was only the first part of the third American Presidential decision. President Eisenhower, considered a friend of the Arabs because of his stand against Anglo-French-Israeli aggression against Egypt in 1956, took the second, pro-Israeli part of the decision. President Eisenhower, also unable to provide Israel with a guarantee of direct military assistance in case of an Arab attack on the Zionist state, decided in 1957 to provide Israel with substantial military assistance with a view to the establishment of a strategic imbalance of forces in Israel's favour in the Middle East. Such Israeli military predominance would preclude the need for direct American military assistance and the difficulties intervention would make for an American President, particularly since the Vietnam experience.

The first United States commitment to the Zionist cause in Palestine emerged following a tussle between distinguished Americans who felt that policy should be based on an objective consideration of their country's interests in the Middle East and powerful and persuasive Zionists who put their desire for a Jewish state ahead of the interests of the United States. This was the case where Woodrow Wilson was concerned. In the instance of the second decision, taken by F.D. Roosevelt, there was no conflict between Zionists and American nationalists; but on this occasion too the Zionists got what they wanted. And then in the case of the third decision, taken in two steps by Truman and Eisenhower, it can be said that the



internal American political situation (the desire not to become involved in foreign wars) and the earlier Presidential commitments to the Zionists led to the policy of Israeli military predominance.

This essay will examine these decisions and their consequences and will attempt to clear up common misconceptions of the American commitment to Israel — particularly concerning the initial American identification with the Zionist programme in Palestine and the determining role of Woodrow Wilson who charted the course of Presidents Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower and indeed of all subsequent American policy on Palestine.

#### *WILSON AND THE POLICY OF THE JEWISH NATIONAL HOME*

President Wilson's crucial decision was based on acquiescence to forces around him rather than firm belief in a particular line of action. This came about because Woodrow Wilson was not, in fact, a dynamic leader, because he was not really interested in the Arab world and because he was deeply obligated personally to an ardent Zionist. Wilson's major decision was really comprised of three lesser decisions, all of them a consequence of the President's passive acquiescence.

Wilson's first decision was to identify himself — and the United States — with the British Government's declaration favouring the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jews. The President took this decision only after the intervention of one of his intimate advisers, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, a man who was a 'spectacular'<sup>1</sup> Zionist.

Brandeis's assumption of an active role in the American Zionist movement coincided with his commitment to the presidential campaign of Woodrow Wilson in 1912. Brandeis,

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(1) Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration*, London 1961, pp. 194-97.

then a distinguished lawyer and well-known 'Liberal' and social reformer, had been associated with Wilson for a long time. Christopher Sykes, in his book *Two Studies in Virtue*,<sup>2</sup> states that 'Wilson was attached to Brandeis by ties of peculiar hardness, because, so the story ran, in his earlier days the future President had been saved by this man from appearing in a damaging law-suit. It was said that Brandeis was regarded by Wilson as the man to whom he owed his career.' Wilson met with such opposition to the appointment of Brandeis to his first Cabinet that the President was forced to withdraw Brandeis's name. But in 1916 Wilson succeeded in securing for Brandeis a seat on the Supreme Court. By that time Brandeis was President of the Federation of American Zionists.

At this juncture, the British Zionists, with Weizmann at their head, were looking to the United States and the American Jewish community for assistance. Weizmann sought a favourable response to a proposal then before the British Government for Anglo-Zionist cooperation in the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and Weizmann needed support for British suzerainty in Palestine — in order that an Anglo-Zionist programme could be implemented. Weizmann was in constant communication with Brandeis who Weizmann believed -- and as it turned out correctly -- could be of great assistance in the United States. The State Department and the Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, did not favour the Zionist programme and the President, while 'vaguely sympathetic,' showed 'no inclination to exert himself' in the Zionists' interest. On April 8, 1917, Weizmann wrote to Brandeis asking for 'an expression of opinion' from him and from 'other gentlemen connected with the [American] Government in favour of a Jewish Palestine under a British Protectorate' which 'would greatly

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(2) Christopher Sykes, *Two Studies in Virtue*, London 1953, p. 133.

strengthen our hands.’<sup>3</sup>

On April 22, 1917, Mr. Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, arrived in Washington. During his American visit Balfour had several talks with Brandeis which had the effect of strengthening Balfour in his determination to help the Zionists, on the one hand, and of persuading Brandeis to promote the Anglo-Zionist alliance in America, on the other. Early in May Brandeis telegraphed London of his approval of the Zionist programme and during that month he had two discussions with President Wilson on the matter and submitted a copy of the Zionist programme to the State Department.

But Wilson's interest in Zionism was not strong enough for him to take any steps, although this did not mean that the President was by any means indifferent either to the fate of the Palestinian Jewish community or to Zionist influence among American Jews. The United States had directly, if distantly, involved itself in the life of the small Palestinian Jewish community in 1914 when, as the U.S. was not a belligerent in the war, Palestinian Jews applied to American consular officials for protection. Then during the presidential campaign of 1916 Wilson's political aides publicized the President's interest in the Palestinian Jewish community, directing an appeal, for the first time, to Jewish voters on the basis of their presumed interest in Zionism. In this election the so-called 'Jewish vote' was injected into American internal politics.<sup>4</sup>

In September 1917, the British Government sounded Wilson on his views concerning a British declaration of intent on Anglo-Zionist cooperation in Palestine. Wilson's response was chilly. Leonard Stein, the foremost authority on the

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(3) Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

(4) Frank E. Manuel, *The Realities of American-Palestine Relations*, Washington 1949, pp. 175-76.

Balfour Declaration, believes that Brandeis probably did not know about the first appeal to Wilson, but it is certain that he was not only aware of but also in on the second approach by the British Government to Wilson a few weeks later. On this occasion Brandeis did not go directly to Wilson, but to Colonel House, the President's closest adviser and the person with whom Wilson had conferred before sending his reply to the first British enquiry. This time Wilson's response, communicated by House, was favorable. Brandeis obviously had persuaded House that a change of heart on the British proposal would be to the President's political advantage. It is interesting to note that the second communication was not made by the President directly, but through his adviser; perhaps Wilson was not altogether happy about his second thoughts.

Leonard Stein believes that Wilson's second response was crucial, that the Balfour Declaration might never have been issued if Wilson had maintained his original hostility to the proposal.<sup>5</sup>

On November 2, 1917, Mr. Balfour wrote to Lord Rothschild who was acting on behalf of the British Zionist Federation, saying that the British Government viewed 'with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,' pledging that the British Government would 'use their best endeavours to facilitate this object.' This letter which became known as the 'Balfour Declaration' was the foundation stone of the Zionist state in Palestine. Accordingly Woodrow Wilson bears certain responsibility in the founding of this state.

And, Brandeis's role must not be forgotten. The way the British Zionists approached Justice Brandeis, who was not altogether convinced of the advisability of an Anglo-Zionist alliance, brought him round to their point of view and persuaded

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(5) Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

him to use his influence with Wilson was a measure of both their tact and good judgement. From that time on Brandeis was the figure in the background who kept Wilson true to his pro-Zionist course whenever the President seemed to be wavering.

After his approval of the Balfour Declaration in October, 1917, Wilson made no move to make public his support of the Anglo-Zionist programme. One must remember that the Declaration was, in fact, an understanding which had been concluded secretly between the British Government and the English Zionist Federation.\* The first indication that Britain had Allied approval of the Declaration came in the British Parliament on December 12, 1917, when the Foreign Secretary was asked if 'an accord [on the policy] had already been established' so that the Allies were 'working together in the matter.' Balfour replied, 'Yes; we are working in the fullest accord.'<sup>6</sup>

The Zionists in America, however, found Wilson's reluctance to openly identify himself with the Anglo-Zionist project very frustrating indeed, and they pressed Wilson for a public statement.

On December 13, Secretary of State Lansing addressed a letter to the President asking him to avoid any public commitment to the Zionists. The Secretary of State argued that the U.S. was 'not at war with Turkey, and therefore should avoid any appearance of taking territory from that Empire by force... the Jews are by no means a unit in their desire to re-establish their race as an independent people' and 'many Christian sects and individuals would be opposed to the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.' And Lansing concluded, 'I do not think we need go further than the first reason given,

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\* The Zionists published the text of the Declaration on November 9, 1917.

(6) Quoted in Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 588.

since that is ample ground for declining to announce any policy in regard to the final disposition of Palestine.' According to Lansing, the President replied to his letter verbally at a Cabinet meeting on December 14, 'saying that very unwillingly he was forced to agree with me, but said that he had an impression that he had assented to the British Declaration regarding returning Palestine to the Jews.' From this exchange one might conclude that Wilson's commitment to the Zionists was less than firm, or wholehearted, as he was prepared to agree with Lansing on the advisability of a public statement on the matter. It is probable that Wilson, at this point, did take Lansing's advice for he delayed public announcement of his support for the Anglo-Zionist programme for another nine months. It was during this period of private-approval-public-silence that Wilson enunciated his famous principles on which the Peace Settlement was to be based.

The President made his international reputation on January 8, 1918, when he presented to the American Congress his 'Fourteen Points' in which he rejected the right of territorial acquisition by force, condemned the conclusion of secret agreements and proclaimed the principle of the self-determination of peoples. Point XII stated specifically that the 'non-Turkish nationalities' of the Ottoman Empire should be assured 'an absolute unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.' Then in an address on January 11, the President said that 'peoples and provinces are not to be bartered about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were mere chattels and pawns in a game, even the great game, now discredited, of the balance of power; but that every territorial settlement involved in the war must be made in the interests and for the benefit

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(7) *Ibid.*, Stein questions Lansing's account of his exchange with Wilson but admits to the delay that followed this exchange.

of the populations concerned.<sup>8</sup> In a third address at Mount Vernon on February 4, Wilson called for a peace settlement based on 'the free acceptance of the peoples involved,' applying this rule of self-determination to the Middle East as well as Europe.<sup>9</sup> The Allies pledged to make Wilson's principles the basis of the settlement.

Arnold Toynbee describes Wilson's prestige in Europe at this time as 'astonishing' and considered it as 'a measure of the aspirations of our world.'<sup>10</sup> The people of the Arab world, expecting their promised reward of independence in return for joining the British in the fight against Turkey, were just as enthusiastic and expectant as the people of Europe. Thus, the Paris Peace Conference, opening in January 1919, was dominated by the figure of that former college president. His words had a world audience and considerable moral — and political — force; he had great potential influence on the outcome of the Paris talks. It might be argued that perhaps Wilson felt the enthusiastic public response accorded to his Fourteen Points would sweep aside the European Allied Powers' narrowly national claims on former Ottoman territories as well as the conflicting demands of former Ottoman subjects for independent states of their own. But both the Allies and the nationalists used that year between the enunciation of the Fourteen Points and the opening of the Peace Conference to lobby for support for their claims and demands. And, it was a fact that Wilson succumbed to the advances of two minority groups, the Armenians and the Jews. Thus Woodrow Wilson, the father

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(8) Henry Cattan, *Palestine, the Arabs and Israel*, London 1969, p. 15n.

(9) Quoted in Harry N. Howard, *The King-Crane Commission, An American Inquiry into the Middle East*, Beirut 1963, p. 13.

(10) Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Abridgement of Vols. I-VI by D. C. Somervell, London 1946, p. 552.

of self-determination, played a key role in denying the right of self-determination to the bulk of the people in the areas claimed by the Armenians and the Zionist Jews.

Wilson was personally interested in the Armenian cause and it took little persuasion to win his support for the establishment of an independent Armenia in a large area of Anatolia. The Zionists had a more difficult task to accomplish and for them it was an urgent task for they wanted to have the situation firmly in hand before the Peace Conference convened. It appears that they were particularly alarmed by reports that an American Jewish anti-Zionist body was being created by Henry Morgenthau, former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, and other influential American Jews. The Chairman of the American Provisional Committee for General Zionist Affairs (formerly the Federation of American Zionists)\*, Rabbi Stephen Wise, sought to preempt the anti-Zionists and made 'urgent representations' to the President. On August 27, 1918, Wise met with Wilson and the meeting was followed by an exchange of letters. Wise tried to reassure Wilson, reminding him that in the Zionist (Basle) programme 'no reference is made to the Character of the suzerainty which might obtain over [a Jewish homeland]. The Balfour Declaration, likewise silent on this subject,' said Wise, 'involves no challenge to the present suzerainty and leaves that for determination at the peace table.'<sup>11</sup> Considering that the Zionists felt they had a firm promise of territory in Palestine, Wise was only trying to reassure Wilson that there was nothing in the way of free discussion and action by the Peace Conference on suzerainty — but not on self-determination, however, for the Balfour Declaration and Wilson's acquiescence to it had settled that issue.

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\* Wise had succeeded Brandeis who had resigned after his Court appointment. Brandeis was Honorary President.

(11) Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 595.



Wilson replied to Wise in a letter dated August 30 in which he scrupulously avoided any formal commitment of the United States Government to the Anglo-Zionist programme but gave the Zionists assurances of his personal 'satisfaction' over the 'progress of the Zionist Movement in the United States and in the Allied countries since the declaration by Mr. Balfour on behalf of the British Government.'<sup>12</sup>

On the very eve of the Peace Conference in January 1919, the Zionists sought final assurances from Wilson. Weizmann was received by the President and left his interview with the understanding that the Zionists had his personal support.<sup>13</sup>

President Wilson tried time and again in his dealings with Zionist leaders to assert that his support for their cause was purely personal and that such support in no way committed the United States Government to a particular policy. Wilson's attitude was both naive and hypocritical. He might have been able to make this distinction between Woodrow Wilson, former college president, and Woodrow Wilson, chief executive of the United States, if he had refused, in September-October 1917, to give any opinion either for or against the Balfour Declaration. Then, with a clear conscience, he could have told the Zionists, 'I offer you my personal support for whatever it is worth.' But Wilson chose to identify himself and the United States with the Balfour Declaration; his was a political and not a personal act. The Zionists knew for certain that Wilson's personal sympathy could mean favourable political dividends for their cause; that is why they relentlessly pursued this elusive man. And they were not proven wrong.

Wilson's approval of the Balfour Declaration, his letter to Wise and his assurances to Weizmann, which were public by the time the Peace Conference opened, added up to a considera-

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(12) Text in Manuel, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

(13) Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 595.

ble commitment by the President of the United States to the Anglo-Zionist scheme for Palestine. His identification with the Declaration itself was in violation of his own principles, contravened his condemnation of secret treaties and negated his principle that the settlement in the Middle East would be based on 'the free acceptance of the peoples involved.' By committing himself and the United States to the Zionists before the Peace Conference even opened, Wilson in effect withdrew Palestine from the area under consideration and ensured that the Palestinians would never be granted the right of self-determination.

#### *WILSON AND THE POLICY OF PALESTINE AS A JEWISH STATE*

President Wilson's second acquiescence took place in Paris at the Peace Conference.

The question of the Turkish settlement came up as soon as the American delegation arrived in Paris; it was in Western Asia, not in Europe that the spoils of war lay.

On January 18, the Conference opened. On January 21, the President was handed a series of recommendations by his advisers of the Intelligence Section of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace. With respect to Palestine, a separate state was proposed with Britain as mandatory and it was recommended 'that the Jews be invited to return to Palestine and settle there, being assured by the Conference of all proper assistance in so doing that may be consistent with the protection of the personal (especially the religious) and the property rights of the non-Jewish population, and being further assured that it will be the policy of the League of Nations to recognize Palestine as a Jewish state as soon as it is a Jewish state in fact.'<sup>14</sup>

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(14) Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 11-12.

This became the working paper of the American delegation — and of President Wilson. On the Palestine question the memorandum gave to the Zionists all they wanted — and much more. It was a clear recommendation to make of Palestine a gift to the Zionists irrespective of the right of the people of Palestine, according to Wilson's own principles which had been accepted by the Allies, to self-determination. The suggestion that the 'Conference' should give the Zionists 'all proper assistance,' in fact, constituted a proposal that the Anglo-Zionist cooperation in Palestine should be widened to become Allied, international cooperation. And then came the most significant recommendation of all; this was that Palestine should be recognised 'as a Jewish state as soon as it [became] a Jewish state in fact.' This went beyond the Balfour Declaration in two aspects; first, it gave to the Zionists all of Palestine whereas the Balfour Declaration left the territorial commitment to the Jews vague — 'to establish in Palestine a national home for the Jewish people' — and second, the memorandum redefined the stated goal of Zionism in Palestine from the creation of 'a national home' to the establishment of 'a Jewish state.' This memorandum made concrete what the Balfour Declaration had, purposely, left vague.

The British Government had insisted that the wording of the Balfour Declaration should remain vague because the British did not want to inflame Arab public opinion against them and the British did not want to promise something they might not be able — or be prepared — in the long run to deliver. Always the British had to think of their position and interests in the Middle East. But the United States did not and as a result could recommend policies that were far-reaching and fully spelled out, policies that were directed against the people of the Middle East. It appears that Balfour himself had been prepared to accept the Zionist formulation which called for 'the reconstitution of Palestine as the national home of the

Jews,'<sup>15</sup> while the rest of the Cabinet favoured the less concrete wording that was finally adopted. As late as mid-1923 the British Government reaffirmed its intention with regard to the questions of the area of and 'suzerainty' over the Jewish homeland. The then Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Devonshire, speaking to the House of Lords, said, 'Again and again it has been stated that the intention from the beginning has been to make a National Home for the Jews, but every provision has been made to prevent it from becoming in any sense a Jewish State under Jewish domination.'<sup>16</sup>

As an indication of the attitudes and expectations obtaining in the American Commission to Negotiate Peace the memorandum is a significant document. The recommendations were not only premature since the Conference had not got underway when they were made, but they were also strongly prejudicial to the objective consideration by the Conference of the case of Palestine. This memorandum indicated that the Americans did not think in terms of a policy promoting the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine, but rather of a policy favouring the 'reconstitution' (using Zionist terminology) of Palestine as a Jewish state. Because Wilson accepted this memorandum as the working paper of his delegation, the thinking behind the recommendations persisted and is the basis of United States policy today. But this was only the first instance in which Wilson passively allowed an important interpretation to pass.

Wilson acquiesced a second time, allowing the Zionists to give their own new, more favourable interpretation to the Balfour Declaration. On March 3, 1919, while Wilson was on a brief visit to the United States, he received the representatives of the pro-Zionist American Jewish Congress, Rabbi Wise and

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(15) Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

(16) *Ibid.*, p. 556.

Louis Marshall. Although the President did not authorise any statement on the meeting, he permitted himself to be quoted as saying: 'I am persuaded that the Allied nations, with the fullest concurrence of our Government and people, are agreed that in Palestine shall be laid the foundations of a Jewish Commonwealth.'<sup>17</sup> On April 13, Secretary of State Lansing enquired of Wilson if he had been accurately quoted. On April 16, Wilson replied to Lansing that he had not used 'any of the words quoted, although he had used their substance.' Wilson also said that the statement attributed to him went, in Wilson's own words, 'a little further' than his intention. He had meant 'to corroborate our expressed acquiescence in the position of the British Government with regard to the future of Palestine,'<sup>18</sup> in other words to re-endorse the Balfour Declaration.

Stein asserts that this incident 'suggests that Wilson was not giving the Zionist question much serious thought. The obvious explanation is that, preoccupied with other matters which interested him more, he had been ready to allow words to be put into his mouth.'<sup>19</sup>

It is probable that Wilson did not use the words 'Jewish Commonwealth' which were peculiar to the Zionists, but rather that he framed his statement using words like 'Jewish state' or the 'Jewish National Home' which were current among the Americans in Paris. Whatever Wilson said, he had definitely committed himself to the Zionist position and he would not retract or make any effort to correct the Zionist version of his message of support. This constituted total submission to the Zionists. Wilson had lost control of American policy on the question of Palestine as a result of his second acquiescence.

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(17) *Ibid.*, p. 596.

(18) Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 31n.

(19) Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 596.

From this point on the initiative was with those Americans who interpreted the goal of the Zionist endeavour in Palestine as the establishment of a Jewish state or the creation of a Jewish Commonwealth. This became the official American policy of promoting Palestine as a Jewish state.

*WILSON AND THE PROBLEM OF SELF-DETERMINATION  
FOR THE PALESTINIANS*

During the Peace Conference the embarrassing issue of self-determination for the Palestinian people was raised. Wilson was subjected to both pro- and anti-Zionist pressures. The anti-Zionists comprised an influential group of American missionaries and businessmen with long experience in the Middle East. These men felt that the Anglo-Zionist alliance was not in the American national interest as eventually this alliance would find strong opposition among the people of the Middle East.

On January 30, the Conference approved, in principle, that certain Allied Powers (namely Britain and France) should be given mandates in the former Ottoman territories in order to guide the peoples of these territories to full independence. Britain, naturally, sought the appointment as mandatory in Palestine. But on March 20, Wilson suggested that an Inter-Allied Commission should be appointed to discover the opinion of the peoples of the territories in question. Wilson proposed that this Commission be composed of representatives of Britain, France, Italy and the United States, but when it really came down to appointing Commissioners only the United States obliged in doing so.

Alarmed at the prospect of losing all that had been promised to them, the Zionists did not waste time. On March 26, Professor Felix Frankfurter of the Harvard Law School, acting on behalf of the Zionist Organisation, called on Colonel House in Paris. The object of this visit was to obtain House's assur-

ances on Wilson's position. House wrote : 'The Jews have it that the Inter-Allied Commission which is to be sent to Syria is about to cheat Jewry of Palestine.' House, however, gave Frankfurter assurances to the effect that 'there was no such intention,' indicating that the Balfour Declaration was still the basis of American policy. Frankfurter came away from the meeting with House with the impression that the Commission was merely a way of postponing a decision.<sup>20</sup>

After considerable delay and a good deal of discussion Wilson decided to despatch the American Commissioners, Henry Churchill King and Charles R. Crane, to the Middle East. Wilson's motives for sending the Commission were as follows: first, to put off a final decision on the mandatory for Palestine by appointing a commission of enquiry, a standard delaying tactic employed by politicians; second, to bow to the wishes of the influential anti-Zionist Americans; and third, to give himself the satisfaction that he had at least consulted the opinion of the people of Palestine.

The King-Crane Commission visited Palestine between June 10 and 25, 1919, and then went on to visit Syria and Turkey. The Commission wrote up its report during the last week in August and on August 30 cabled a summary of its conclusions. On the Palestine question, Crane's cable recommended that Palestine should not be separated from Syria (as the British and Zionists wanted), that the 'extreme Zionist program' should be 'seriously modified,' that America should accept the mandate for a unified Syria or that, in case of American refusal, Britain should be given the mandate.<sup>21</sup>

In their report the commissioners were emphatic on the question of 'modification of the extreme Zionist Program for Palestine' involving 'unlimited immigration of Jews' with a view to 'making Palestine distinctly a Jewish State.' The commis-

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(20) Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

(21) *Ibid.*, p. 218.

sioners asserted that 'a national home for the Jewish people' is not equivalent to making Palestine into a Jewish State; nor can the erection of such a Jewish State be accomplished without the gravest trespass upon the 'civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities...' The fact came out repeatedly in the Commission's conference with Jewish representatives, that the Zionists looked forward to a practically complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, by various forms of purchase.' The commissioners were absolutely explicit on the opinion of nine-tenths of the inhabitants of Palestine, the 'non-Jewish population,' who the report said were 'emphatically against the entire Zionist program.'<sup>22</sup>

Crane's telegram had forewarned Wilson of the content of the Commission's recommendations; the President never read the report and for more than three years this document remained a secret, tucked away in the files of the Department of State in Washington. Both King and Crane felt that Zionist opposition might have been a factor in Wilson's refusal to make the report public.<sup>23</sup> Once again Wilson's private sympathies (or political requirements) were translated into American national policy. But Wilson apparently had no intention of seriously consulting the recommendations of his own Commission; the House-Frankfurter interview, which took place three months before the Commission's despatch to Palestine and five months before the King-Crane Report was completed, indicated exactly what the President's intentions were: to go ahead with his pro-Zionist policy irrespective of the findings of the King-Crane Commission. Wilson had obviously never considered that the rule of self-determination should be applied in Palestine. Thus the interviews conducted by the King-Crane Commission in Palestine and Syria were just theatre, a spectacle

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(22) *Ibid.*, p. 350.

(23) *Ibid.*, p. 309.



to impress the 'natives' of Palestine and to calm the anti-Zionists.

*WOODROW WILSON, THE GREAT LIBERATOR OR THE GREAT DECEIVER*

President Wilson has the reputation of being the great idealist among American Presidents. On the question of Palestine Wilson certainly displayed no idealism; he had no desire to apply his principle of self-determination to the Palestinian people and was content to allow Britain and the Zionists to pursue a policy which was clearly designed to deprive the Palestinians of their homeland altogether — as well as to deny them self-determination. Moreover, we have seen that his decisions on the Palestine issue were based on Wilson's personal involvement with Brandeis (and the Zionists) as well as the crasser realities of practical politics in the U.S. Wilson's great ambition was to play a world role and because he was a 'Liberal,' he found particularly attractive the idea of becoming the protector of minorities and oppressed peoples. These interests led the President to involve himself in the affairs of two Middle Eastern minorities, the Armenians in Turkish Anatolia and the Jews in Palestine. Wilson's involvement in the affairs of these two communities brought disaster to the Middle East: in the case of the Armenians, the Turkish majority in Anatolia massacred and expelled these people from the area in question; and in the case of Palestine, the Zionists expelled the Palestinian majority from their homeland. Thus in one case the people Wilson favoured met with tragedy, while in the other the people he had forgotten, the Palestinian people, were driven into exile.

In Europe the rule of self-determination had been successfully applied to the former subjects of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. The frontiers of Europe were redrawn so that only three per cent of the people of Europe lived under

alien rule. But in the Middle East, the opposite was true. Frontiers were redrawn but there was no self-determination for the peoples of the Arab world so that when the settlement was made in Paris it could be said that all but three per cent of the Arab people were under foreign domination. In fact before the Peace Conference even convened the fate of the former Arab subjects of the old Ottoman Empire was sealed: they were denied any say in their destiny and their lands were divided up and occupied by France and Great Britain. But the most shocking aspect of the deliberations that took place in Paris was the continuation of President Wilson's own identification with that other 'secret' agreement, the Balfour Declaration, and the Anglo-Zionist enterprise in Palestine.

It can be argued in Wilson's defense that he was not familiar with the facts of the Palestine question: but this was not the case, because the arguments against the Zionist programme were directly and fully presented to the President by no less a person than Robert Lansing, the Secretary of State, as well as by Henry Morgenthau and President Howard Bliss of the Syrian Protestant College (later the American University of Beirut). If the President could claim ignorance in the fall of 1917 when he gave his approval to the Balfour Declaration, he had no such excuse by January 1919 when he contravened all his principles to back the Zionists in Palestine.

Again in Wilson's defense it can be said that he simply acquiesced in the *fait accompli* of the British and French occupation of the Levant and Mesopotamia. It is said that the Allies had no choice but to permit the establishment of the Polish, Czech and other European national states because the Allied Powers were in no position to put down any of the nationalities of the dismembered empires. But in the Middle East French and British troops were already in place and the peoples of the area were not able to resist occupation. Therefore

it could be argued that Wilson's idealistic proclamation of the Fourteen Points could not have made any impact on the political situation obtaining after World War I, that the entire Peace Settlement was dictated by *realpolitik* rather than principles. In order to accept such arguments, however, we would have to set aside the fact of Wilson's great prestige after the war and the obvious consternation the President's announcement of the creation of the Inter-Allied Commission caused in the Zionist (and the British and French) camp. Colonel House's comment on the visit paid him by Frankfurter just a week after Wilson's proposal of the Commission — 'The Jews have it that the Inter-Allied Commission... is about to cheat Jewry of Palestine' — is an indication of what the Zionists feared this idealistic, high principled American President might do. The Zionists need not have worried, however, for Wilson was beholden to Brandeis who was a deeply committed Zionist.

Thus for the Arab people Wilson's high sounding principles were just so many words, and for the Palestinians his *realpolitik* brought disaster. In fact, Wilson was not the 'Great Liberator' but rather the 'Great Deceiver.'

#### *ROOSEVELT AND PALESTINE AS THE ULTIMATE REFUGE OF THE JEWS*

The effect of Wilson's involvement with the Zionists was to leave the United States committed to the recognition of Palestine as a Jewish state as soon as it became a Jewish state in fact. Wilson had to deal with the Zionists' demand for territory; the next logical step was to fulfill the need of the Zionists for people to settle in that territory so that it could become a 'Jewish state in fact.' In this matter, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was obliged to yield to the requirements of the Zionists.

Roosevelt's involvement with the Zionists came about because he had great sympathy for the Jewish victims of

Hitler's racialist policies. Five years after Hitler had risen to power in Germany and several years before the world discovered the terrible consequences of Hitler's policies, Roosevelt took the initiative to call a conference to discuss how to deal with the problem of persecution of the Jews in Germany. Influenced to a certain extent by 'the propaganda of Judah Magnes (of the Hebrew University)'<sup>24</sup> Roosevelt called for a conference in June 1938, to be attended by representatives from the Americas and Europe, excluding Germany. At that time Roosevelt was poorly informed on the state of affairs in the Middle East and he knew very little about the struggle over Palestine. He considered that the conference 'would manifest before the non-European world the urgency of emigration, chiefly to Palestine.'<sup>25</sup> The British Government, then engaged in suppressing a Palestinian Arab rebellion, were alarmed at the thought of how such a conference would affect events in Palestine. The British argued that the conference should deal with all refugees, not just Jews from Germany; that only representatives of countries prepared to accept immigrants should be invited; and that Palestine should not be discussed. Roosevelt agreed to the British conditions and the conference was convened at Evian in France on July 6, 1938.

By proposing this conference Roosevelt raised the hopes of many distressed minorities who sought relief from oppression at home and open doors to countries where they could take refuge. For a moment the United States seemed to be coming out of its isolationism and taking an interest in the world's problems, but soon after the conference opened it was clear that most of the representatives attending, including those of the United States, were not authorised to make any concrete proposals. The representative of the Dominican Republic was the

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(24) Sykes, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

(25) *Ibid.*, p. 195.

only person to offer, on behalf of his Government, entry to a large number of refugees: his country agreed to receive 100,000 Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. The other thirty states attending the Evian Conference merely proposed that they add a few more thousand Jews to their immigration quotas.

The Zionists regarded the Evian Conference with 'hostile indifference'; they would have been enthusiastic if the conference had been based on Roosevelt's original proposal. But, in the words of Christopher Sykes, 'The fact is that what was attempted at Evian was in no sense congenial to the spirit of Zionism. The reason is not obscure. If the thirty-one nations had done their duty and shown hospitality' to German's persecuted Jews 'then the pressure on the National Home and the heightened enthusiasm of Zionism within Palestine, would both have been relaxed.'<sup>26</sup> Freedom of emigration for the Jews was the last thing the Zionists wanted; it was important for their endeavour that the democratic nations of the world should not permit Jewish immigration. Zionism was predicated on the alleged need of the Jews for a refuge; the Zionists' programme required that Palestine should be the only country where the Jews could go and feel welcome: 'If their policy entailed suffering, then that was the price that had to be paid for the rescue of the Jewish soul.'<sup>27</sup>

Although Roosevelt had been influenced by the Zionists with respect to proposing the conference, it does not appear that the Zionists made any attempt to influence the outcome of the Evian meeting. They did not need to. The selfish interests of the countries attending, with the exception of the Dominican Republic, caused the failure of the Evian Conference, not outside pressure. This lesson was not lost on Roosevelt who put his full weight behind a second meeting convened in

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(26) *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

(27) *Ibid.*

Bermuda in April 1943. 'One of Roosevelt's greatest hopes was that immigration barriers against Jews might be lifted by all nations, including the United States.'<sup>28\*</sup> The President had also become more sophisticated in his approach to the thorny problem of Jewish immigration to Palestine: 'To Roosevelt it seemed dishonest to demand immigration concessions from the Arabs while the United States retained its tight and selective quota laws.'<sup>29</sup> This was, of course, in direct contradiction to the Zionist claim that the only solution to Jewish homelessness lay in the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Roosevelt was well aware of the requirements of the Zionists, but in 1943 — unlike Wilson in 1917 and 1919 — the President had to consider American interests in the Middle East. Roosevelt could do nothing to prejudice the position of the United States, or of Great Britain, in the Arab world as this area was an Allied theatre of war. Furthermore, by 1943 the United States had other interests in the Middle East: oil, trade, politics, strategic geography. Roosevelt did not want to threaten any of these interests by gaining the enmity of the Arabs over Palestine.

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\* The United States followed a policy of free immigration until 1923-24 when Congress enacted new immigration laws which greatly restricted immigration, particularly with regard to Jews and coloured people. These immigration laws were tailored to preserve the racial balance obtaining in the United States in 1923. Taking these laws into consideration, it is interesting to note that between 1900 and 1914 the American Jewish population increased from one to three million, between 1914 and 1928 (after four years of restriction) to 4.2 million, and between 1918 and 1943 to 5.2 million. See Samuel Halperin, *The Political World of American Zionism*, Detroit, 1961, p. 47.

(28) Richard B. Stevens, *American Zionism and U. S. Foreign Policy (1942-1947)*, New York 1962, p. 45.

(29) *Ibid.*

The problem of Jewish immigration to Palestine was intimately related to the stability of the Middle East and to the Allied war effort. The Palestinian Arab rebellion had made the British Government, to some extent, modify its programme of gradually building up a Jewish majority in Palestine with a view to Jewish self-determination in that country. The key proposition of the 'White Paper' of 1939 issued by the British Government defined a quota of 75,000 Jewish refugees for the next five years (an initial quota of 25,000 refugees and 10,000 Jewish immigrants per year) and stated that thereafter any further Jewish immigration would have to have the agreement of the Arabs of Palestine. The implementation of such a policy would have meant for the Zionists that no Jewish majority could be built up and that Palestine would never become a 'Jewish state in fact.' Roosevelt had approved of the British policy (signalled by his acceptance of the British redefinition of the brief before the Evian Conference) and agreed that an influx of Jewish refugees into Palestine would force a final settlement (of the issue of Jewish self-determination in Palestine) before the Allies could sit down at a peace conference and decide what was to be done.

The Bermuda Conference had as its guiding principle non-involvement in political issues. It was claimed that the Conference had a purely humanitarian role to fill and accordingly the representatives who assembled in Bermuda did not discuss the issue of Jewish immigration to Palestine, a very political issue indeed. But, because of the importance Jewish immigration to Palestine had for the Zionists, the decision of the two leaders, Roosevelt and Churchill, who had called for the meeting, to consider the question of Jewish refugees in Europe as an integral part of the overall refugee problem, was a crucially important political decision. And it was a major threat to the Zionists. Thus, the Conference was subjected to continuous and bitter criticism from Zionist quarters and the

Roosevelt Administration was itself divided on the issue.

After the Bermuda Conference the President felt that the problem of Jewish emigration could be solved if the big powers offered hospitality to substantial numbers of refugees; he felt that other nations would follow the example of a generous initiative. But Roosevelt knew that the American Congress would be against the United States making the first offer and so he sent Morris Ernst, himself a Jew, as his envoy to London to secure Churchill's agreement in the immigration of 100,000 Jews to Britain. If Churchill agreed, Roosevelt felt that he might be able to persuade Congress to endorse the entry of another 100,000 into the United States. The President reasoned that the Congress could not adhere to its restrictive immigration policies in the face of the demonstration of British good will towards the Jewish refugees. Roosevelt had campaigned for the removal of all immigration barriers; he believed that all people should be accepted regardless of race, colour or religion. 'But when Roosevelt undertook to implement this program he discovered that the Zionists were against it.'<sup>30</sup>

Morris Ernst's mission was a success: Churchill agreed to accept the 100,000. But Roosevelt could not match the British offer and the proposal was dropped. Ernst later attributed the defeat of Roosevelt's gesture directly to the Zionists: '... to me it seemed that the failure of the leading [American] Jewish groups to support with zeal this immigration program may have caused the President not to push forward with it at that time.'<sup>31</sup> It should not be assumed, however, that Roosevelt himself was greatly affected by Zionist opposition to his proposal; in this instance, the interests of the American legislators in Congress coincided with the requirements of the Zionists

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(30) *Ibid.*, p. 71.

(31) *Ibid.*, p. 71-77.



— both wanted the continuation of restrictive immigration practices. If the Zionists had chosen, instead, to exert their influence in Congress, which was considerable, in favour of concessions on the Jewish refugees, there was a good chance that Congress would have backed the President. But the policy of the Zionists was Palestine or nothing.

It is unfair to say that Roosevelt's acquiescence in the immigration impasse constituted a 'decision' in the sense that Wilson's acquiescence in the Balfour Declaration did. Roosevelt bowed to *force majeure*, Wilson had second thoughts prompted by the intervention of an influential Zionist. But Roosevelt's acceptance of the situation did constitute a decision because thereafter Roosevelt did not raise the question of United States immigration reform and a general international open door policy with respect to the Jews. Roosevelt's defeat issued in the policy of Palestine as the ultimate refuge of the Jewish people. This was a world policy, not only a United States policy and its emergence, because of the selfish interests of the states concerned, was a major coup for the Zionists. It can not be said that the Zionists engineered this coup, however; they only supported it and benefited from it. From that time on the Zionists could say, in truth, that Palestine was the only refuge of the Jews, the place where Jews could be welcome among their own kind. This was the Zionist lever against British immigration restrictions in Palestine. Taken a step further by the Zionists (who have been backed by states who still do not want large number of Jewish immigrants), this becomes the policy of Palestine as the ultimate refuge of the Jews (who are liable to persecution and in need of such a refuge since no one else will have them). With respect to the Zionists and their supporters, then, emigration to Palestine offers the ultimate solution of the 'Jewish problem.' This is why Roosevelt's 'decision' or capitulation is one of the major American decisions on the Palestine question.

Jewish immigration figures indicate just how important this was to the Zionists for the establishment of their state: Jewish immigration into Palestine was well below the level of 10,000 per annum set in the 1939 White Paper (issued by the British Government) amounting to 8,398 in 1940, 5,886 in 1941, 3,733 in 1942, and 8,507 in 1943 (the year of Roosevelt's defeat), but the number of immigrants rose appreciably in 1944 to 14,464, in 1945 to 13,121, in 1946 to 17,761 and in 1947 to 21,542. Then between January 1 and May 14, 1948, the last months of the British Mandate, Jewish immigration rose to 17,165, and between May 15 and December 31, 1948, after the proclamation of Israel, the figure became 101,828.<sup>32</sup> The influx of immigrants just after the establishment of the Zionist state is an indicator of just how well Zionist emigration policies and pressures worked; once the doors to Palestine were open (while other doors remained firmly closed), Jews whom nobody else would take were funneled into Palestine. What happened after May 15, 1948, must have appeared to the Zionists as a complete vindication of their policy, while for the Palestinians who were expelled from their homes, the influx of Jews meant their permanent replacement.\*

#### *ROOSEVELT AND THE POLICY OF PALESTINE AS A JEWISH STATE*

Roosevelt's confrontation with the Zionists took place on more than the immigration issue; he was also under constant pressure to endorse the political programme of the American Zionists. This was the so-called 'Biltmore Programme' named

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\* Court Folke Bernadotte, the UN Mediator, writing after the Palestinian expulsion in 1948 warned against just this eventuality in his *Progress Report*, 16 September 1948.

(32) Samuel Halperin, *The Political World of American Zionism*, Detroit 1963, Appendix VI, p. 331.

for the conference that issued the programme which was called in May 1942 at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City. The key paragraph of this important document read: 'The Conference urges that the gates of Palestine be opened; that the Jewish Agency be vested with control of immigration into Palestine and with the necessary authority for upbuilding the country, including the development of its unoccupied and uncultivated lands; and that Palestine be established as a Jewish Commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world.'<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting to note that the very words 'Jewish Commonwealth' were used by the Zionists in 1919 when they issued their communique on the meeting of Wise and Marshall with President Wilson. The use of this word 'commonwealth' was very important to Zionist thinking because it defined the Zionist goal in Palestine as being more than the establishment of a Jewish state. This goal was, in fact, to found a national home or a state which would look after the interests of all Jews, or which would be the guardian of the welfare of the Jewish communities throughout the world. When in 1919 President Wilson was quoted as having given his support to the idea of a 'Jewish Commonwealth,' the implications of the Zionists' employment of these words were not clear. By 1943, and particularly after the defeat of Roosevelt's immigration proposal, the meaning of the 'Jewish Commonwealth' was very clear indeed. In the Biltmore Programme the Zionists themselves asserted that the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth would solve the 'problem of Jewish homelessness.' To President Roosevelt, who felt very keenly the need to alleviate the sufferings of the Jewish refugees in Europe, there seemed to be no alternative but to take a step towards the Zionists. And because Roosevelt was not a man

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(33) Stevens, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

to take half measures, he went the full way to meet the demands of the Zionists. But before making his proposal for the settlement of the Palestine problem, Roosevelt gave assurances to the Arabs.

In April and May 1943 King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia wrote to the President warning him of the consequences in the Arab world of the adoption by the United States of a policy supporting Zionist efforts in Palestine. The King asked the President to take no steps on the Palestine question without informing him in advance, and the President promised that 'no decision altering the basic situation of Palestine should be reached without fully consulting with both Jews and Arabs.'<sup>34</sup> The State Department desired to follow up Roosevelt's private commitment to King Ibn Saud by collaborating with the British Government in a joint declaration 'that no final decision over Palestine would be taken until after the war, and then only after full consultation with both Jews and Arabs.'<sup>35</sup>

It seems that Roosevelt's hopes for Arab-Jewish agreement emerged from a meeting he had with Weizmann during which Weizmann described a proposal which had been conceived by St. John Philby, the British adviser of King Ibn Saud, and to which Churchill had given his approval. The Philby plan was as follows: 'All of Palestine was to be left to the Jews; All displaced Arabs were to be settled elsewhere at the expense of the Jews, who would place twenty million pounds for this purpose at the King's disposal; All other Arab countries in Asia were to be recognized as independent with the exception of Aden; Britain and the United States were to propose these arrangements to Ibn Saud, and to jointly guarantee them in case of Arab acceptance.'<sup>36</sup> Philby thought that the Arabs 'in their own best interests, would do well to "...aim at an obtainable

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(34) *Ibid.*, p. 73.

(35) *Ibid.*, p. 74.

(36) *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75n.

*quid pro quo*" at the expense of an undeniable right,'<sup>37</sup> that is the right of the Palestinians to live in their homeland. It appears that Weizmann had approached Churchill when the latter was First Lord of the Admiralty, on December 17, 1939, and had discussed the matter with Roosevelt in February 1940. Philby also put the matter before Ibn Saud in 1940. But nothing came of the proposal because the world's leaders were preoccupied with the conduct of the war rather than a settlement in Palestine and it was not until 1942 that the Philby plan was revived. Ibn Saud rejected the plan directly; he refused to entertain Roosevelt's suggestion that he should meet with Weizmann or another official of the Jewish Agency to discuss the issue; the King said that 'he could not speak for Palestine, much less deliver that country to the Jews.'<sup>38</sup>

Roosevelt again found himself unable to act. The proposal of an Anglo-American statement postponing the Palestine issue until the end of the war and promising full consultations with both Arabs and Jews was again put forward but the influential Zionist Congressman from New York, Emanuel Celler accused officials of the Administration of having 'contributed to the betrayal of Palestine' and threatened to call for a Congressional enquiry 'unless the State Department ceases its absurd opposition to Palestine as a haven for the Jews.' Celler then demanded that the President appeal to Churchill at the Quebec Conference (August 1943) 'for a Palestine homeland for the Jews.'<sup>39</sup> Churchill and Roosevelt retreated from their intended declaration on Palestine and decided to make their policies on the basis of events in Palestine, from month to month.

Throughout 1943 and 1944 the President was subjected to continuous Zionist pressure to issue a statement in favour

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(37) *Ibid.*

(38) *Ibid.*, p. 76.

(39) *Ibid.*, p. 77.

of the Biltmore Programme. Roosevelt, however, still sought to honour his commitment to King Ibn Saud that nothing would be done until the end of the war and without prior consultation with the King. The State Department played a considerable role in postponing any decision although two of Roosevelt's close advisers, Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State, and Cordell Hull were both pro-Zionists. During this period the President tried studiously 'to be all things to all people.' Sometimes, however, his policy did not succeed as on the occasion when the Zionists, Rabbis Wise and Silver, drafted a statement to be issued by the President in March 1944. This proposed text would have committed the United States to the whole Zionist programme including acceptance of the Jewish Commonwealth idea if Roosevelt had not ignored the Zionists' communication. Instead, Roosevelt issued a general statement on European refugees. But this only intensified Zionist pressure and the Zionists began to threaten Roosevelt with the loss of the 'Jewish vote' in the November (1944) elections. Both the Republican and Democratic parties responded to the Zionist challenge by including in their party platforms extensive promises to the Zionists in Palestine. Roosevelt followed the example of his party in July in a letter to Senator Wagner of New York who was to convey its contents to the Zionist Organisation: 'Efforts will be made to find appropriate ways and means of effectuating [the policy of the Jewish Commonwealth] as soon as practicable. I know how long and ardently the Jewish people have worked and prayed for the establishment of Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth. I am convinced that the American people give their support to this aim and if re-elected I shall help to bring about its realization.'<sup>40</sup>

According to Frank Manuel this statement was an important 'departure from previous Presidential salutations to the

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(40) *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

Zionists.<sup>41</sup> This was not merely an expression of favour or support for the Zionist programme but a promise to see to its implementation.

After the elections, however, Roosevelt returned to his former 'independent'<sup>42</sup> policy. He even asked the Zionists to call off proposed Congressional resolutions in favour of the Zionist programme for Palestine and before his third inauguration considered 'a possible rapprochement with Ibn Saud in regard to the Palestine question.'<sup>43</sup> The President met the King after the Yalta Conference and just a week before his death. President Roosevelt gave further concrete assurances to Ibn Saud. Writing on April 5, 1945, Roosevelt said that he 'personally, as president would never do anything which might prove hostile to the Arabs' and that 'the United States Government would make no change in its basic policy in Palestine without full and prior consultation with both Jews and Arabs.'<sup>44</sup>

In spite of the fact that Roosevelt's actions cannot be considered real 'decisions' in the sense that Wilson's acceptance of the Balfour Declaration can, President Roosevelt's actions did support the Zionist line that Palestine should be recognised as the ultimate refuge of the Jews and therefore should be constituted as a Jewish Commonwealth. But the impact of Roosevelt's involvement in the Palestine question was not felt during his presidency but only after his death during the presidency of Harry S. Truman. The reason that Roosevelt never followed through with anything he initiated in favour of the Zionists was that he was not convinced that Zionist and American interests coincided in the Middle East. At least one Zionist writer, J.C. Hurewitz<sup>45</sup>, believes that Roosevelt, if he

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(41) Manuel, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

(42) Stevens, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

(43) *Ibid.*, p. 87.

(44) *Ibid.*, p. 89.

(45) J. C. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine*, New York 1950.

had lived, would have pursued a policy in the Middle East which would not have endangered America's national interests in the area. This would have meant saying 'No' to the Zionists. For the Zionist cause, Roosevelt's death may well have been fortunate.

At this point we must briefly discuss the two Presidents, Wilson and Roosevelt, so alike and yet so different. Both were 'Liberals' and Democrats, humanitarians, idealists. Both had great moral force. And both gave in to Zionists at crucial moments in the Zionist struggle to establish themselves in Palestine.

Toynbee's remark that Wilson personified the aspirations of the post-World War I era effectively sum up the potential of the man. Yet Wilson's capitulation was personal rather than political and one can only conclude that he was a man without moral courage.

Roosevelt, to a certain extent during his lifetime, fulfilled his potential; it was only later that the effects of his involvement with Zionism emerged. Emanuel Neumann, a devoted Zionist, writing some years after Roosevelt's death, best summed up this pragmatic politician, farsighted statesman and understanding man. Neumann stated that the President's personal friendship and sympathetic concern for the Jewish people did not mean that he had any time for the Zionists. Neumann said that Roosevelt had a 'deep-seated skepticism' about a 'Jewish Palestine' and described Roosevelt's attitude towards the Zionist endeavour as 'uninvolved benignancy.' Neumann also admitted that the Zionists dared not go against this powerful American President for two reasons, first because to the Jewish people all over the world Roosevelt was their 'great friend and champion,'<sup>46</sup> and second, because Roosevelt was in power, it seemed as though he would be elected and he would be a

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(46) Stevens, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.



key figure at the peace conference. Thus, in their dealings with Roosevelt the Zionists had to operate with deliberate caution. They dared not engender his wrath by vociferously opposing his policies. On the one hand, Zionist fear of and respect for Roosevelt gave him the leeway to pursue policies which he felt would best serve the American national interest while, on the other hand, Roosevelt's (and his party's) political requirements were such that he could not ignore the demands of the Zionists. In the first area where Roosevelt confronted the Zionists' immigration policy, he was defeated in an anti-Zionist policy by Congressional unwillingness to change restrictive immigration laws rather than Zionist opposition; Zionist opposition in this instance merely served to buttress Congressional attitudes. In the second area, political campaigning, Roosevelt temporarily acquiesced in the demands of the Zionists but quickly resumed his independent policy once he was re-elected. The curious episode of Roosevelt's acceptance of Philby's proposal to Ibn Saud demonstrates how idealistic Roosevelt could be, and how naive. The President obviously felt that this plan could solve both the Palestine problem and the question of where to send European Jewish refugees at the same time. The key to Wilson's policy was Brandeis, but Roosevelt was not bound to the Zionists by comparable personal ties. Thus, Roosevelt was free to do the best he could, although even his best was not good enough and the United States became committed to the policy of Palestine as the ultimate refuge of the Jews.

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The implementation of the two policies, the policy of Palestine as a Jewish state and the policy of Palestine as the ultimate refuge of the Jews, was left to Harry S. Truman, who was, unlike both Wilson and Roosevelt, a firm supporter of the Zionist cause. On May 15, 1948, President Truman was informed of the establishment in Palestine of the State of Israel and minutes later he granted *de jure* recognition to the Jewish

state. Indeed Palestine *was* recognised as 'a Jewish state as soon as it was proclaimed a Jewish state 'although only one third of the population of Palestine was then Jewish.' Between May 15 and December 31, 1948, more than 100,000 Jews entered Israel and the implementation of the policy of the Jewish state as the refuge of the Jewish people began in earnest. And this policy has led to the replacement of the Palestinian people — who were expelled by Jewish forces in 1948-49 — in their homeland and more than twenty years of Palestinian exile.

*THE POLICY OF ISRAELI MILITARY PREDOMINANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST*

In their memorandum of January 1919, the Intelligence Section of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace had not foreseen the consequences of their recommendation that Palestine should be recognised as a Jewish state as soon as it became one *in fact*. The memorandum envisaged the gradual replacement of the Palestinian Arab population by immigrant Jews and the eventual creation of a Jewish state on the basis of a Jewish majority in Palestine. The Palestinians' resistance to their gradual displacement caused the Zionists to resort to the use of force to attain their goal. And because Israel was carved out of Palestine by force, the Jewish state found that it had to maintain itself by military means in a hostile environment. The only way Israel could do this was either to obtain a commitment from a Great Power, namely the United States, guaranteeing the continued existence of the Jewish state by means of military intervention by that Power, or for Israel to have military superiority over the Arab states. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower were faced with this problem and, in two steps, they took the decision to establish Israel as the predominant military force in the Middle East.

President Truman's decision was that he could not commit American troops to fight for the Zionists in Palestine. In any

case the President was in no position to commit troops to the Palestine struggle because such a move would have been extremely unpopular in a war-weary United States. Truman was forced to take this decision in 1945 while the debate was raging in the United States about Jewish immigration to Palestine — whether or not the United States was prepared to take the consequences of advocating the entry into Palestine of 100,000 Jewish refugees which was certain to result in conflict. The President, upon his return from the Potsdam Conference, publicly expressed his impression that 'it would require a half million American soldiers to keep the peace in Palestine.'<sup>47</sup> In the event, American troops were not required for the establishment of the Jewish state, but the question of how this state was to be maintained was not resolved until the Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower.

When General Eisenhower first campaigned for the Presidency, the most important problem facing the United States was the Korean war. He campaigned on the basis that he was going to end the war in Asia as quickly as possible and bring the American soldiers home. There was no question of Eisenhower committing American forces to fight another war in Asia, even on behalf of the Zionists, although the newly born Zionist state did not in fact require direct military intervention in its behalf against its neighbours. Instead the Israelis and their American Zionist lobby constantly requested American arms aid.

It was not until 1955, however, that the United States Government began seriously to consider the possibility of making available substantial quantities of armaments to the Israelis. This came about in 1955 when the Soviet Union supplied Egypt with military equipment (after America had refused to do so) in the second Soviet-Middle Eastern arms deal, the

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(47) *Ibid.*, p. 133, Rabbi Silver in a letter to Senator Wagner.

first being the supply of Czech arms to the Israelis in 1948, which arms enabled the Israelis to launch their April offensive and subsequently to capture eighty per cent of Palestine. The Soviet-Egyptian arms deal alarmed John Foster Dulles, the American Secretary of State, in particular. The attack by British, French and Israeli troops on Egypt in October-November 1956, caused the Secretary of State to reconsider the American approach to instability in the Middle East. On January 5, 1957, President Eisenhower made proposals for a new American Middle East policy in his message to Congress. He asked for a joint resolution of the Senate and the House of Representatives to authorise the President to take steps to combat 'the predatory desires of international communism' in the Middle East.<sup>48</sup> The proposal that was relevant to American-Israeli relations recommended that the United States should undertake military assistance to any country requesting such aid. Congress obliged and the so-called 'Eisenhower Doctrine' came into being. Under the Eisenhower Doctrine the United States began to supply substantial amounts of military equipment to Israel with a view to maintaining the 'balance of power' in the area, which meant, in fact, a military imbalance in favour of the two million Israelis against the 100 million Arabs of the Middle East and North Africa.

This became the policy of Israeli military predominance which was pursued by President John F. Kennedy who gave the Israelis American 'Hawk' missiles as well as other equipment, by President Lyndon B. Johnson who promised Israel the latest American 'Phantom' fighter-bombers and by President Richard M. Nixon who so far has delivered the 'Phantom' aircraft and proposed the extension of \$ 500 million in credits to maintain Israeli military superiority in the Middle East.

The decision by Eisenhower-Dulles in 1957 to supply Israel

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(48) John C. Campbell, *Defense of the Middle East*, New York 1960, p. 122.

with arms was perhaps the most fateful and certainly the most dangerous of the three basic American decisions on Palestine. The Arab states cannot allow Israel, an alien state, to dominate the Middle East and the Arab peoples cannot forget that Israel was established at the expense of the Palestinian people. Thus, until Israel consents to make a satisfactory settlement with the Palestinian people, who after all are the aggrieved party, the Jewish state will have to struggle to exist in a hostile environment, fighting will break out from time to time — as in 1956 and 1967 — and the United States will have to maintain Israeli military predominance in the Middle East.

Let us briefly look at how this decision was taken in order to compare it with the decisions taken by Wilson and Roosevelt. The decision to promote Israeli military predominance in the Middle East was taken in two steps more than ten years apart; it was taken by two very different Presidents who were members of two different political parties. In the case of Truman, his contribution to the policy of Israeli predominance was not a result of his support for the Zionist cause in Palestine, but rather because he was in no position to send American soldiers to fight in Asia. In fact, it could be argued that Truman might have committed American troops to fight on behalf of the Zionists if it had been possible at the time. In the case of Eisenhower, his decision to sell Israel armaments came as a result of American fear of increasing Soviet power and influence in the Middle East, not because Eisenhower was particularly pro-Israel. At the time he made his contribution to the policy of Israeli military predominance, President Eisenhower was engaged in obtaining the Israeli military withdrawal from the Egyptian Sinai. Thus it would seem that Zionist influence was minimal in the instance of the third key American decision on Palestine.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this essay I have tried to describe the three basic American decisions on Palestine taken by four different American Presidents, these decisions being the constituents of American Palestine policy. For observers of the current Middle East scene there are two major conclusions to be drawn from this analysis of American involvement in the question of Palestine.

The first is that the commitment of the United States to the Jewish state is long-standing. This American commitment is based on two ideas, first, that Palestine should be 're-constituted' as a national home for the Jewish people and second, that the only solution to the problem of 'Jewish homelessness' is to be found in Palestine. These two ideas were incorporated into American policy by two Presidents, Wilson and Roosevelt, for widely different reasons: by Wilson because he was beholden to Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, an ardent Zionist, and by Roosevelt because he could find no other way to alleviate the suffering of European Jewish refugees than to support their immigration to Palestine. Truman took the first step towards the establishment of Israel as the predominant power in the Middle East because like Roosevelt, on the question of Jewish immigration, he had no other choice. And Eisenhower was interested more in the Soviet-American balance-of-power equation than the military requirements of Israel.

Thus we must recognise the American commitment to Israel for what it is: an *ad hoc* commitment made by individual Presidents in response to the demands of the moment. For Wilson, Brandeis was the determining force; for Roosevelt, American isolationist-protectionist Congressmen, with their coincidence of interests with the Zionists, were the key; and for both Truman and Eisenhower, American reluctance to fight for other peoples was the important factor. In none of these cases were the old clichés of 'the Jewish vote' and 'Zionist influence in publicity media' and 'cronyism' in the White House

the forces behind the decisions taken. Wilson's initial commitment to the Zionists, due to direct Zionist influence, set the United States on its pro-Zionist course in the Middle East, a course which it has been impossible for later Presidents to alter. Zionist political and financial and publicity influence have been a major factor in keeping American Presidents on the course charted by Wilson, but we must not forget that the Zionists were not the force behind all the American decisions on Palestine policy. The simple fact that these Presidents, three 'Liberal' Democrats and one Conservative Republican, have come down on the Zionist side should be enough to make us pause and have a second look at American policy.

The second conclusion is that American policy on Palestine has not been a real policy in fact, that it has constituted a series of *ad hoc* political decisions by individual Presidents, that these decisions have been based on short-term and even personal interests and that the whole approach of the United States to the problem of Palestine has been against the American national interest. This essay has dealt with the nature of the decisions taken by American Presidents and has attempted to show how and why these decisions have been taken. But, we have not looked at the American national interest. Here the most important point is that the interest of the United States in the Middle East cannot be served if American Presidents support the Zionists against the desires and interests of the peoples of the Middle East. This has been proven by the results of United States support for the Zionists in Palestine: wide-scale rebellion in Palestine, three local wars in the Middle East since the establishment of the State of Israel, the dispossession and exile of an entire Middle Eastern people, instability in the Arab countries of the Middle East, a Middle Eastern arms race, the emergence of Soviet and Chinese Communist influence in the Middle East. Thus, American Palestine policy has not had a record of success. It would seem that the United

States should promote peace and stability, economic development and popular political institutions in the Middle East rather than war and instability and tragedy and superpower confrontation. And yet, although Roosevelt did make an attempt, the American national interest has never been consulted in the making of Palestine policy.





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